2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

robes (a gown not unlike a woman's dressing-gown), wears a bright-coloured turban, and has one or two men walking behind him, he is a rather important village headman. One particular item of clothing in the Kawinga, Liwonde and Nyambi areas, is the scarlet headband which some village headmen may wear. I shall discuss this later in the context of the competition of village headmen for rank.

Another external characteristic of rank, which seems to have disappeared with the changing economic structure of Nyasaland, was the carrying of knives (*nsinjo*) by important village headmen. Previously, status was indicated by the type and size of knife carried in public. The chief usually carried the largest and most ornate. The knife taken from Kawinga on his surrender in Portuguese East Africa was about 18 inches long and had a decorated ivory handle. Smaller knives of similar pattern belonged to his headmen.[1] Nowadays, many young commoners carry knives two or even three feet long, made from the broken blades of motor-car springs.

The right of important village headmen to build fences [2] at the back of their huts is also a mark of prestige which seems to have lost its significance. About 50 years ago only important headmen had the right to erect a fence at the back of their huts. This fence, made of tall grass about six feet high, enclosed the grain stores and other food supplies of the household and formed a private compound in which the headman's wife and slaves carried on their daily tasks.[3] It seems likely that private compounds and slavery were positively associated, so that only the important village headmen who had many slaves found it necessary to build fences. All chiefs and most important headmen to-day still erect these fences. Those who hold initiation rights are obliged to build them because, when the initiands return from the seclusion phase of the initiation ceremony, they are supposed to spend one night in the headman's private compound before going back to their villages. But nowadays, minor village headmen and commoners also frequently build these

[1] See f.n. 4, Chap. II, p. 38.

[2] *Lusenje*, pl. *ndenje*. The enclosed space or 'compound' is *cimbundi*. Typical hut compounds are depicted on Plate IX (*a*) and (*b*), facing p. 206.

[3] MacDonald suggests that the common term *kusyeto* for woman is derived from the adverb *kusyeto*—on the other side (of the fence).

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

compounds, especially in areas where there are man-eating lions,[1] so that it is no longer an infallible indicator of the hut-owner's rank.

Minor village headmen always allow their superiors to sit on a chair. If village headmen of commensurate status are present, chairs may be sought for them all. But a minor village headman never occupies a chair, even if one is available, in the presence of his superior. At a meeting, for example, a chief occupies a chair and so may his most important *nduna* or councillor. The more important headmen sit alone on separate mats, for a man only shares a mat with his equals, and then only rarely. Junior headmen, however many there are, have to try to squeeze themselves on to one mat or squat on the ground.

Important headmen also have the right of walking in front of their juniors. If there are three or four headmen returning from, say, a court case, they arrange themselves in the pathway in an order which reflects their rank. As they file down the narrow field paths the leader is the most senior among the group. After him come the other headmen and last of all the commoners. This order of precedence is also followed when initiands pass through the tribal initiation ceremonies. The sisters' sons and other matrilineal descendants of important headmen precede those of the less important headmen. At Chiwalo's hut also, I have noticed that the more important headmen sit under the verandah while listening to private cases. The less important headmen sit with the commoners under a shelter or out in the sun.

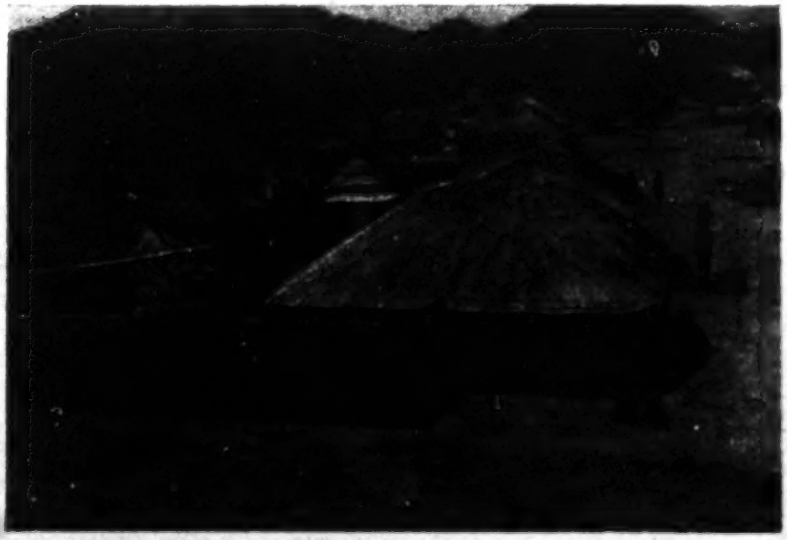
I have been discussing the visible marks of prestige. But high rank also tends to carry with it some other privileges which are not immediately observable. The most obvious is Government recognition. I have already mentioned that under the 1912 Ordinance, village headmen were recognized by the Administration. These Administrative village headmen, who had certain duties to perform, were paid a small annuity and were in earlier days given a 'book' in which the tax payments could be recorded. To-day, the Yao still describe Government recognition as 'having a book'. Administrative village headmen derived more benefit from Government recognition than merely an

[1] The huts in Plate IX (*a*) and (*b*) are in Namwera area where there are man-eating lions. Most huts have compounds. A large proportion of huts in areas where there are no lions also have compounds.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 · FT7 Yao FT7

361
342
351

(*a*) Part of a village in Namwera area. The distinct group of huts on the right is not related to those in the left-hand corner, but is only one section of the village.
(*October 1948*)



(*b*) A slightly different view of the same part of the village. The fence encloses the grainbin, kitchen and latrine.
(*October 1948*)

PLATE IX

[facing p. 206]

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

and the baskets and pots. A wooden dish *mbiri* may be seen occasionally, but of late years, this has been generally replaced by enameled articles.

Around the entire hut, or simply enclosing a yard behind it, there is often a fence about five feet high. In the enclosure thus formed, many household duties are performed, such as the pounding and sifting of grain. The grain store *nguluwe* often stands in this yard with the pigeon-loft and possibly a hen-house or goat kraal; these are sometimes found in the open space at the front of the house. If a grain store is built within the hut itself, it is then known as *mbengu*. Near the pigeon-loft will be seen a pole with prongs supporting an old pot with water for the pigeons to drink. In a tree in the bush nearby, there may stand a beehive, consisting of a bark cylinder. Similar cylinders are sometimes used as pigeon-houses.

The large pots for brewing beer are usually set in the yard or on the back veranda, together with a basket of split bamboo for carrying fowls, *chitulatula* (Yao and Chin.).

Gourds. Gourds are grown in the village for use as vessels of various kinds. Different shapes serve different purposes; names are given them according to use rather than shape, though these more or less coincide. Ladles for water or beer, *macwalo* or *mpao* (*nacwaro* or *chiko*, Chin.) are usually long-handled gourds (Pl. XIV, figs. 7, 8, 9). Drinking vessels for beer, etc. *chipanda* and a specially large one, *ntumbo* are usually of the shape illustrated in Plate XIV, fig. 1; sometimes they are like fig. 5, but this shape is more commonly used for water. *Lipache*, the type illustrated by fig. 2, is also used for drinking or for holding gruel. Oil flasks, *chisasi* (*tsupa*, Chin.), are usually of the double-bellied type (figs. 4 and 6). Salt bottles, *chitumbo* (*chigwe*, Chin.), are similar to oil flasks. Rattles, *sanje*, used at dances etc., are also made from gourds, often from those with tuberosities (fig 3). Other uses for gourds include pipes, snuff-boxes, enema funnels, and resonators for musical instruments.

Pottery. The art of pot-making appears to have been known to the Yao for a very considerable period. There is no history relating to its introduction among them. The art is in the hands of the Yao women. As among all Nyasaland tribes, a particular kind of clay is used and no admixture with any binding substance is made. The pots are simply moulded by hand from base to brim and, without the aid of any wheel or other device, wonderful symmetry is attained.

After drying, the pots are fired by being set on their bases on the ground and a wood fire is made round and above them. They are then sprinkled with an infusion of the *nyombwe* or *ntumbi* tree, a hand of millet being used for the purpose, after which the pots are set upon a fire and millet husks are thrown into them and allowed so to be incinerated. These customs, a kind of christening of the pots, "insure their turning out well."

No glaze of any kind is used, but they are sometimes colored red by boiling with a pigment called *nguwe*, prepared from a red sediment found in sluggish streams. The preparation of *nguwe* is in the hands of men and women who make a trade of it, such as a man called